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DANGER: Thin Ice

(ANCHORAGE, Alaska) – It is the time of year where ice begins to form on many bodies of water statewide. The danger of falling through ice is very prominent in Alaska as the state encompasses many thousands of lakes, streams and rivers. This past weekend a man in rural Alaska drowned after he and his son broke through thin ice while snowmachining.

Factors that affect ice strength included weather, water depth and size of the body of water, currents or undersprings, water level fluctuation and obstructions. **ALWAYS BE ALERT WHEN VENTURING OUT ON ICE!**

Allow for at least 2 inches of clear, solid ice to build up prior to walking (without stopping) on it. For any type of stationary activity, such as ice fishing, allow at the minimum of 4 inches of clear, solid ice to form. Do not ride snowmachines or ATVs on the ice unless at least 5 inches of clear, solid ice has formed. For larger vehicles, do not drive out on the ice unless there are 12 or more inches of ice built up. Keep in mind that older ice is not as strong as newly formed ice and river ice is not as sturdy as ice formed on lakes.

Signs of weak ice include:

- Varying ice colors (black and gray)
- Obstruction sticking through the ice (i.e. logs, vegetation and rocks.)
- Slush or snow on ice
- Bubbles or water on ice surface
- Porous-looking ice
- Cracks in ice
- Pressure ridges or faults
- Water running underneath ice
- Open water in the middle of a large body of water

If you hear ice crack, spread out and move away from others to distribute weight. You should immediately lie down on the ice, than crawl on your stomach until you reach a safe location. If someone falls through the ice call 911 and then use a pole, branch, rope or other long object to try and reach the victim—stay clear of the broken ice as there is a risk of the ice being too weak to hold your weight. If you fall through the ice, stay calm. Call out for help and kick your feet while getting hands and arms up onto the ice. Continue to swim up onto the ice until you can crawl or roll to safety. Pets that go out on ice are a major cause for many near-drownings and deaths. If your pet wanders onto dangerous ice, do not follow them. Stay where you are and coax them back to safety.

DPS cautions all recreationists to keep safety first while out in the backcountry!